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The remarkably rapid growth of the town from 1849 to 1851, when the cotton mill was being built, led to the project of building a public schoolhouse. The American Cannel Coal Company donated the lot and the Indiana Cotton Mill Company gave money toward the cost of the building. A stone structure was erected in 1850 at the eastern part of town. This soon proved to be too small and various other buildings were used until a new brick school building was finished in 1856 on a lot given by the coal company. This last building was used in 1859 for the courthouse, and school was once again held at various places until 1868, when Myers' Grade School/The Free School was built (photo #10).

The town was incorporated by action following a public vote, on September 18, 1852. The trustees elected were William Knight, Dwight Newcomb, Frederick Boyd, Hamilton Smith and William P. Beacon. In March, 1856, a formal petition was presented by Charles H. Mason to move the seat of Perry County from Rome to Cannelton, which was more centrally located along the Ohio River. This move was dropped, probably because it lacked two-thirds of the vote. In 1858, the question was renewed and a petition was presented by Ballard Smith and William P. Beacon.

The two-story brick schoolhouse, built in 1856, was selected as the courthouse. Land for this schoolhouse had been given by the American Cannel Coal Company and, at the time the building was selected for the courthouse, the coal company gave more land in the center of Cannelton adjacent to the school. Preparations were made to erect a jail and remodel the school building for the county offices. On March 8, 1859, the County Board accepted the proposals and formally announced the change of the county seat from Rome to Cannelton. By December 7, 1859, all the buildings were ready and the records and offices were moved to Cannelton by steamboat. In 1896, the new Courthouse Building (photo #11) was finished and the county offices were moved across Seventh Street to the new building. In 1922, the present brick high school building was constructed (photo #33). In 1928, a new community building (photo #34) was built on the lot once occupied by the 1856 schoolhouse.

The Ohio River was the major route inland during the early 1800s, and riverboats are important in Cannelton's history. In 1825, when Lafayette's steamboat was wrecked four miles upstream from Cannelton at Rock Island, Cannelton was virgin forest. Docking at points of easy access along the river, storeboats brought in goods for the pioneers and other riverboats picked up produce to be sold. From 1850 through 1860, more than 20 river packets were in regular trade between Louisville and New Orleans. The Reindeer, Europa, Magnolis, Richmond and Eclipse were sternwheelers and sidewheelers which carried passengers as well as cargo; some of these boats were luxurious, with Oriental carpets, elaborate meals and personal service. Others, such as that operated by Thomas Irvin, who later opened a grocery (photo #19) in Cannelton, were simple storeboats. Many others were flatboats, carrying only cargo. The river continued throughout Cannelton's manufacturing history to be a major travel route.

As one might expect in a river town, there were several early sandstone buildings along the riverfront, although few remain. The first record of a stone building in Cannelton is James Boyd's Stone Store, built in 1843, when he was lessee of the American Cannel Coal Company. In 1844, another stone store was built by James Boyd at the same location at First and Taylor Streets. Other early stone buildings by the riverfront which no longer remain are the Clark Pottery building where the present toll bridge spans the Ohio River, and a stone building which was built by Dwight Newcomb and later used as part of the Sunlight Hotel until it was destroyed by fire in 1917; the present Sunlight Hotel (photo #29) was built on the site in 1928. Today, a locks and dam at Cannelton raises the Ohio River,

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where barge traffic remains constant. A floodwall separates the city from the riverfront and no docks remain. A toll bridge spans the Ohio River from Cannelton to Hawesville, Kentucky, as a major access route between the two states.

Due to the difficulty of access over the hilly terrain, a railroad was not built to Cannelton until 1887 when, after many aborted proposals, a line was built from Lincoln City to Cannelton. During the 1880s and 1890s, the town continued to be a center of trade. In 1908, the Cannelton Sewer Pipe Company was incorporated by Henry Clemens; this provided a second major industry for the town. Modest residences were built adjoining the retail center to house the growing number of workers. Examples of these houses can be seen in photos #77 and #82.

Many commercial buildings were built at this time; a look down Washington Street reveals a wealth of Italianate detailing, especially in the second stories and the cornices of the buildings (photo #56). Some exceptional examples of these commercial buildings which retain their original architectural character are the Jacob Heck Store (photo #18), The Pumper Tavern (photo #26), Rosenblatt's Store (photo #28), Sam's Tavern (photo #69), the August Heck Store (photo #60, and Hawhee's Store (photo #30). The residential area adjacent to the downtown central area also has a fine example of this style in the Mason/Newcomb/Sulzer House (photo #15).

Through the first half of the 20th century, Cannelton remained a prosperous river town with two large industries, a ferry across the Ohio River, and a prospering downtown area. Today, the railroad is gone, and the main road is Highway 66 (known as Seventh Street as it passes through town). Trucks serve as the main form of transportation for the principal manufacturing industry left in Cannelton, Can-Clay, which descended from the Cannelton Sewer Tile Company of 1908.

In 1954 the Indiana Cotton Mill closed, selling its machinery and vacating the building. Over the next ten years several different companies occupied various floors of the building, but eventually the building was no longer used. During this time, many of the older retailers and professionals retired, younger people moved out of the town to find employment elsewhere, and businesses closed. By 1980, many of the downtown buildings were vacant or underused. Historic preservation was well served in 1982 when Hubert and Louise Bruce gave the Indiana Cotton Mill building to Historic Cannelton, a non-profit group which has since been looking for funding to restore the historic structure and adapt it to reuse. Can-Clay is still an employer in the Historic District and other employers in Cannelton include Schwab Safe Company, Fischer Chair Company, and Hydro-Tex Corporation.

Today, the Cannelton Historic District is the hub of an active, functioning town. The outlying residential areas are still dependent on the services provided by the central business district and the adjacent governmental core, and Cannelton still provides for its residents the classic example of small town life.

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Gerald Schaeffer, Architect with Wayne E. Seufert and Associates, Inc., Ferdinand, Indiana 47532.

M. F. "Mike" Rutherford, Historian, R. R. 1, Tell City, Indiana 47586.

Cheryl Munson, Staff Archaeologist, Glenn A. Black Laboratory of Archaeology, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana 47405.

Judy Hargis, Postal Carrier (house numbers), Cannelton, Indiana 47520.

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Beginning at a point at the intersection of the northwest property line of a house at 409 W. Seventh Street and the northeast curbline of Seventh Street,

thence southeast 480 feet to the southeast curbline of Madison Street;
thence southwest 940 feet to the northeast curbline of Mill Street;
thence southeast 280 feet;
thence southwest 780 feet to the northeast curbline of First Street;
thence southeast 230 feet to the northwest curbline of Adams Street;
thence northeast 580 feet;
thence southeast 485 feet to the southeast curbline of Washington Street;
thence southwest 580 feet to the northeast curbline of First Street;
thence southeast 490 feet;
thence northeast 960 feet to the northeast curbline of Fourth Street;
thence southeast 30 feet to the northwest curbline of Beckwith Street;
thence northeast 460 feet to the northeast curbline of Sixth Street;
thence southeast 270 feet to the northwest curbline of Congress Street;
thence northeast 150 feet to the northeast curbline of Bry Street;
thence southeast 460 feet to the southeast curbline of Hoskinson Street;
thence southwest 60 feet;
thence southeast 180 feet;
thence northeast 175 feet to the southwest curbline of Seventh Street;
thence northwest 170 feet to the northwest curbline of Hoskinson Street
thence northeast 190 feet to the southwest curbline of Richardson Street
thence northwest 1,075 feet;
thence northeast 200 feet;
thence northwest 380 feet;
thence southwest 200 feet to the southwest curbline of Richardson Street;
thence northwest 1,140 feet along Richardson Street;
thence southwest 270 feet to the place of beginning,
containing 61 acres, more or less.

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Boundary Justification

The Cannelton Historic District boundary lines do not extend much beyond those drawn as a plat map in 1849. Land use remains consistent with that of the early 1900s, with the Indiana Cotton Mill building and the Can-Clay Company industrial site (historically the Cannelton Sewer Pipe Company) still occupying what de la Hunt describes as the "manufacturing quarter" of Cannelton. The boundary for the Historic District is justified by its faithfulness to the early development pattern of Cannelton and by its low percentage of structures intruding upon the Historic District (25 percent).

Most of the houses on the northwest and southeast sides of the Historic District are one story modern houses. The "St. Louis" area southeast of the original plat is another older area of Cannelton, but Casslebury Creek effectively divides this area from the rest of the town. There are a few other significant structures scattered throughout the town, but these are not contiguous to the Historic District.

A small area of land between the Ohio River and First Street to the southwest of the Historic District contains a two story brick Italianate residence built in the 1880s by James Clark; it has a recessed doorway with wooden shutters on the sidelights by the entrance door and other original wood bracketing and trim. Unfortunately, this area is periodically flooded by the Ohio River; a floodwall built in 1950 divides the early riverfront area from the rest of the town.

The steeply rising hills on the northeast have restricted development and form a natural boundary for this side of the district.

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